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Making U.S. Forces Do More With Less: The FY 1999 Defense Budget

This year's defense budget marks the fourteenth consecutive year of decline in defense spending. President Clinton's \$270.6 billion FY 1999 defense budget represents a real decline of 1.1 percent from current spending levels, and marks a 39-percent drop from the spending levels of the mid-1980s. The Clinton Administration's continued negligence toward defense spending stands in sharp contrast to its willingness to allocate \$100 billion for new domestic spending.

While defense spending declines, the U.S. military is continually being asked to do more: since 1990, U.S. armed forces have been used in 36 foreign missions, compared to 22 between 1980 and 1989. This decline has created a dangerous mix of aging equipment, readiness gaps, and problems with the retention of trained and experienced soldiers.

The Ever-Declining Defense Budget

In inflation-adjusted dollars, this year's defense spending level represents the smallest defense budget since the beginning of the Korean War (1950), and represents only 3.1 percent of the nation's gross domestic product, down by more than 50 percent from the mid-1980s level of 6.3 percent of GDP. A comparison of this year's defense budget request for major accounts, compared with last year's enacted levels, is as follows:

ACCOUNT	FY 1999 REQUEST	FY 1998 ENACTED LEVEL
Military Personnel	\$70.8 billion	\$69.7 billion
Operations & Maintenance	\$94.8 billion	\$94.4 billion
Procurement	\$48.7 billion	\$44.8 billion
Research & Development	\$36.1 billion	\$36.6 billion
Military Construction	\$4.3 billion	\$5.1 billion
Family Housing	\$3.5 billion	\$3.8 billion

In five out of six cases, President Clinton's defense budget request is less than the amount enacted last year, assuming a 2% inflation rate. [Further, the only reason last year's enacted

procurement and research and development levels were so high was because the Republican Congress added \$2.7 billion and \$5.7 billion to those accounts, respectively.]

The Continuing Trend in Slashing Weapons Modernization

The FY 1999 procurement request (for new weapons systems) is artificially inflated since this account includes items traditionally not funded through the procurement account, such as sealift. So the apparent increase in this year's procurement account is misleading.

Further, for the fifth year in a row, the Department of Defense has failed to meet its own much-advertised goals for increased procurement levels to provide U.S. forces with the most modern military equipment:

- The FY 1999 \$48.7 billion procurement request is **\$2 billion less** than the Administration's own estimates from last year, which set the necessary procurement levels for FY 1999 at \$50.7 billion.
- And the \$48.7 billion request is still **\$11.3 billion less** than the \$60 billion FY 1998 procurement goal recommended by Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. John Shalikashvili in 1996.
- According to the DoD, procurement is not projected to reach the \$60 billion level (\$61.3 billion) **until FY 2001**.

This year's procurement request, while higher than previous years, is still inadequate for redressing the long-term trend of declining procurement budgets. President Clinton's FY 1997 procurement request of \$38.9 billion represented the lowest level in defense procurement since the Korean War. Since 1992, procurement has been reduced by 44 percent. Since 1985, procurement has declined 71 percent.

Neglecting procurement funding has had its consequences. U.S. military equipment continues to age. In FY 1998, the Administration requested: 4 warships (versus 20 in 1990); 53 tactical aircraft (versus 511 in 1990), and zero tanks (versus 448 in 1990).

During a "field hearing" in Coronado, California, a Marine sergeant told congressmen that some units have .50-caliber machine guns manufactured during the 1940s, and revealed how it can take up to 18 months to get the heavy weapons repaired or replaced. A staff Sergeant testified that, during a recent deployment in Okinawa, his unit had to spend a week each month repairing the HMMWV's (Humvees) assigned to his battalion.

The lack of spare parts for aircraft (including jet fighters, radar jamming planes, and cargo planes) forces squadrons to cannibalize needed parts from other aircraft. One example offered by an Air Force fighter squadron commander: before an Air Force F-16 squadron could fly to Saudi Arabia last year, crewmen had to cannibalize four other F-16s from other units and borrow three planes. [*San Diego Union Tribune*, 3/7/98]

Impact on Short-Term Readiness Significant

The Clinton Administration has embarked on a dangerous course by cutting long-term (procurement) accounts to pay for short-term (operations and maintenance) readiness. This "robbing Peter to pay Paul" operation is necessitated by this Administration's failure to adequately fund the U.S. military. But even short-term readiness has suffered because of this Administration's willingness to deploy U.S. military forces for operations other than war.

The Clinton Administration has sent U.S. soldiers on more nontraditional missions than ever before (e.g., peacekeeping operations in Somalia, Haiti, and Bosnia, and providing humanitarian assistance in Rwanda) creating serious readiness problems that began to surface as early as 1994, when 3 of the Army's 12 divisions were not combat-ready, and all forward-deployed Army divisions reported below-par readiness ratings. This situation continues today.

At a recent [February 3, 1998] Senate Armed Services Committee hearing, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Hugh Shelton admitted that:

"Since the end of the Cold War, we have used our military forces more frequently to support our security interests and conduct major operations where U.S. leadership was needed. There is no question that more frequent deployments affect readiness. We are beginning to see anecdotal evidence of readiness issues in some units, particularly at the tactical level of operations."

The Chairman tried to reassure Members that, "at the operational and strategic levels, we remain capable of conducting operations across the spectrum of conflict," and that "while we are undeniably busier and more fully committed than in the past, the U.S. military remains capable of executing the national Military Strategy with an acceptable level of risk."

This is the first time the military has made a differentiation within readiness levels. But even the existence of anecdotal evidence at the "tactical level of operations" (execution of small-scale actions) is disconcerting because, after a period of time, discrete cases of anecdotal evidence will have a cumulative effect and translate into readiness problems at the operational and strategic (execution of military operations in a battle) level. Finally, the Chairman did not specify what constitutes "an acceptable level of risk" — how many more American lives will be placed in jeopardy because of this Administration's defense policies?

Anecdotal evidence of readiness problems are multiplying. Below is just a sampling:

- After one infantry unit returned from a peacekeeping mission in Macedonia in 1994 — being sent without its Bradley fighting vehicles — it received the lowest score in its division on tests of its ability to shoot and operate its Bradleys.
- In the Air Force, "mission capable" rates for some fighter jets (which measure how many planes can be ready for war on short notice) are more than 15 percentage points lower than they were in 1989.

- Increasingly, Army and Air Force units put off combat training because they are too busy with “low intensity” missions or need the money elsewhere.
- Retention has suffered, as many Air Force pilots are leaving for the more lucrative commercial sector after filling their seven-year commitment, despite cash incentives of up to \$22,000. Throughout the Air Force, pilot retention rates fell to an estimated 75 percent in 1997, down 12 points from 1995 levels. As for the Navy, only 10 percent of eligible carrier pilots — 27 out of 261 — have decided to take bonuses this year and stay. When Air Force and Navy pilots leave, they take with them an average of \$5.9 million in training expenses; elite fighter pilots can require more than \$20 million in training over nine years [*Washington Times*, 3/24/98] .

A U.S. Navy Commander of a carrier wing recently highlighted the host of concerns stemming from readiness problems:

“Despite a shortage of between 80-120 maintenance qualified technicians, we continue to operate at the same tempo. The impact is longer hours, more time assigned to additional duties and less time available for training. This has had a direct impact on Air Wing First Term retention which fell 6 percent below the overall Navy average of 33 percent.” [Readiness Subcommittee Statement, Senate Armed Services Committee, 2/24/98]

Costly Contingency Operations Strain U.S. Forces

In 1995, President Clinton assured the American people that the U.S. military deployment to Bosnia would be short-lived: **“Our Joint Chiefs of Staff have concluded that this mission should and will take about one year”** [Televised White House Address, 11/27/95]. With the Clinton Administration’s February 20, 1998, announcement to maintain U.S. troops in Bosnia indefinitely, these readiness problems are certain to increase. A recent General Accounting Office (GAO) estimate of the total costs for peacekeeping operations in and around Bosnia from December 1995 through June of 1998 is \$6.4 billion; with operations for the first three quarters of FY 1998 alone estimated at \$1.5 billion. [“Bosnia: Operational Decisions Needed Before Estimating DoD’s Costs,” as quoted by *Inside the Navy*, 2/16/98]

But Bosnia only accounts for one of many contingency operations (which include peacekeeping, peacemaking, and humanitarian relief operations) causing a drain on the U.S. military:

- From 1991 to 1998, contingency operations have cost a total of \$16 billion. [House National Security Committee, National Security Report, 2/98]
- Over a three-year period (1992 to 1995), the GAO estimates that U.S. agencies have spent \$6.6 billion to support United Nations peacekeeping and humanitarian operations in Haiti, Bosnia, Rwanda, and Somalia. [*Washington Times*, 3/3/98]

Further, the indefinite nature of the current U.S. military deployment in the Persian Gulf (e.g., length of stay, whether there will be air strikes and if so, for how long) in response to Saddam Hussein's intransigence on weapons inspections will exacerbate the readiness problem. The current crises have U.S. armed forces managing two major operations at once: an open-ended peacekeeping mission in Bosnia with 8,500 U.S. ground troops, and the Gulf crisis (the President has ordered 35,000 U.S. troops in the Gulf since the February 23 U.N. accord to allow inspections of suspected weapons sites in Iraq).

Smaller Government? No, Just a Smaller Military Force

While the Clinton Administration slashes defense spending at the same time it sends soldiers on more missions overseas, it simultaneously is eviscerating their ranks. President Clinton recently claimed to have "the smallest government in 35 years." But the President failed to say that the Defense accounts absorbed 67 percent (222,800) of the 331,000 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) cuts made from 1993 through 1999. Personnel cuts will continue, with reductions of 60,000 in active military personnel, a 55,000-person cut in Selected Reserves and an 80,000-person reduction in DoD civilians, as outlined in the Quadrennial Defense Review, the Pentagon plan for transforming U.S. defense strategy and military forces.

These manpower reductions are hampering the military's ability to fill required positions. Army Chief of Staff General Dennis Reimer recently acknowledged that shifting personnel to meet overseas missions, such as the Bosnia peacekeeping effort, has resulted in undermanned or unmanned squads. In his words to the Senate Armed Services Committee: "Our requirements exceed our people to man those requirements. The whole Army is very busy." [*Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 2/11/98]

Administration's Policies Undermine a High Quality of Life

According to Chief of Staff of the Army General Dennis Reimer, the Army reduced manpower by 36 percent while increasing the number of deployed operations by 300 percent, and increasing workloads by 625 percent, in purely mathematical terms. Vice Admiral Herbert A. Browne, Jr., recently told the Senate Armed Services Committee that:

"Our best and brightest technicians and operators time and again are being asked to sacrifice the precious time they spend with their loved ones during the nondeployed phase of operations to help meet our operational commitments."
[Statement on Fleet Readiness Before the Readiness Subcommittee, 2/24/98]

Not only are U.S. soldiers forced to work longer and harder than ever before, they are also sent on deployments for longer periods of time than ever before. In testimony before the House National Security Committee in March 1997, the Army estimated that its officers and senior non-commissioned officers from deployable units now spend 180-190 days away from home annually, while junior soldiers spend 140-155 days away. In a March 1998 Senate Armed Services Committee hearing, a Marine Colonel related:

"Our AAV [Armored Amphibious Vehicle] and some of our five-ton trucks are particularly old and maintenance-intensive. The situation is similar on the aviation side where we have maintained an overall mission-capable rate of 84 percent despite aircraft that are older than the pilots who fly them. The result is that Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEUs) who will be deployed over 220 days in a 365-day period spend many of the few days they are home working late to keep the equipment functioning." [Statement Concerning Readiness, 2/24/98]

While this Administration claims maintaining a high quality of life is a top priority, its actions tell a different story. President Clinton's FY 1998 budget request proposed cutting military family housing construction by one-third, despite then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. John Shalikashvili noting that **"...we have family housing that we ought to not be asking our folks to live in"** [hearing before the House National Security Committee, 2/12/97].

Then, in October of 1997, President Clinton used the line-item veto to cancel 38 military construction projects in 24 states, for a total of \$287 million. And he did so even after admitting that some projects were mistakenly canceled because of outdated information, and asserting that **"the projects in this bill would not substantially improve the quality of life of military service members and their families..."** [Veto Message of November 13, 1997, H. Doc. 105-72].

Yet, as highlighted during a Senate Appropriations Committee hearing held on October 6 to address the vetoes, some of the programs canceled clearly would improve the soldiers' quality of life. One such program was the dining facility at Malstrom Air Force Base in Montana. This building was originally built for another purpose and only later changed to a dining facility whose serving areas might not pass a health inspection. Further, during the hearing, Senators asked the Service chiefs (including: Major General Clair F. Gill, Director of the Army Budget; Major General Eugene Lupia, Air Force Civil Engineer; and Rear Admiral F. Amerault, USN, Director of Navy Budget/Fiscal Management) whether each of the canceled projects were "mission essential." In every case, the answers were affirmative, confirming Appropriations Chairman Ted Stevens' statement that the White House's decision conflicted with the military needs of the Armed Forces.

Congress passed a bill disapproving the President's cancellations, which he again vetoed. Congress then easily overrode that second veto. The vote in the House was 347-69; in the Senate, it was 78-20. The disapproval bill became law on February 25, 1998 (P.L. 105-159).

Staff Contact: Dr. Yvonne Bartoli, 224-2946